

THAT CONFERENCE WITH MR. SCRANTON

BOARD OF TRADE COMMISSIONERS MAKES ITS REPORT.

Another Session of the City's Most Prominent Deliberative Body in Which Water Rates Are Discussed to the Exclusion of Almost Every Other Question—Lengthy Statement Submitted for Acceptance as the Sentiment of the Board on the Water Question.

Water was again the burden of the board of trade's discussions at its regular meeting last night. A report was received from the special committee appointed to confer with President Scranton, of the Gas and Water company, in which was told what the conference accomplished, or, to be exact, what occurred there; a resolution was presented re-creating at least the sentiment of the special committee.

Incidentally a resolution was adopted pledging support to the new Delaware Valley and Kingston railroad, officers were nominated for the ensuing year and the handsome and substantial compliment was paid Secretary Atherton of granting him an increased and unexpected increase in salary.

The report of the special committee on water rates was prefaced with a statement from its chairman, James H. Torrey, that the committee felt constrained to confine itself wholly within the limits prescribed for it by the resolution under which it was created, namely: "To confer with Mr. Scranton with a view of securing a lower and uniform rate for manufacturers, and to report upon the legal status of the water company."

COMMITTEE REPORT. To the Scranton Board of Trade. The undersigned committee, appointed at the last meeting of the board with instructions to wait upon Mr. W. W. Scranton, president of the Scranton Gas and Water company, with reference to the substance of the resolution adopted at the last meeting, respectfully report: That by appointment a majority of the committee waited upon Mr. Scranton at the office of the Scranton Gas and Water company, on Friday, Dec. 2.

The committee submitted a report on the resolutions of the board, and in accordance with the instructions of the board, suggested to him that the Scranton Gas and Water company should make a uniform and lower meter rate to manufacturers. The committee stated that in their opinion and in that of the board the company would lose nothing by such reduction in the meter rate.

In connection with the suggestion in the action of the board that the location of new manufacturing plants be discouraged by the high water rates, Mr. Scranton asked that some specific case of a manufacturer kept out of Scranton by the water rates be named. The committee stated, in substance, that many factors entered into the decision of the question of any proposed location of manufacturing here, and that it would not be possible to cite any specific case in which that consideration, and that alone, led to a negative decision, but that it was fair to say that in all proposed locations of manufacturing here, the objection was at once raised to the high water rates, and that the exorbitant character of those rates was frequently assigned as a principal, if not controlling, reason for refusing to come here.

At our November meeting this question was ably discussed by a number of our most prominent and respected citizens, men who have been eminently successful in both business and professional careers. The sentiment that the rates to manufacturers are too high was unanimously endorsed. It was stated in general terms that water for steam purposes cost about as much as fuel in certain establishments. This statement, while possibly made to emphasize the fact of the high water rates, was absolutely true, and can be proven.

SOME COMPARISONS. Following is a statement from the books of the Scranton Bedding company, which needs no comment on our part. Yearly rate previous to putting in meter, \$81 per year; per month, \$ 6 75 Meter rate October, 1899, with no steam used in heating building, \$21 29 (Paid on premises.) Meter rate November, 1899, with building heated by steam, requiring (estimated) one-fourth more water than October. Water in use \$ 5 08

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and Water company, Mr. Torrey went on to say, is too large and complex a subject to be made the matter of a written report. In this with the opinions expressed at the last meeting by some of the city's most eminent minds, he, however, would say, that it is quite safe to accept that the company has not an exclusive franchise, and that its rates are subject to the supervision of the courts as to their reasonableness, according to the capital involved.

A motion by Colonel F. L. Hitchcock to receive and file the report and discharge the committee, with the thanks of the board, was provocative of a lengthy discussion as to whether or not it was becoming to discharge the committee at this time. The motion was finally agreed to. Mr. Dale and Mr. Lansing both spoke in favor of discharging the committee, believing it had fulfilled the task to which it was assigned.

Mr. Dale took occasion to say the committee was very courteously received by Mr. Scranton and that they found him not only ready to discuss the matter they presented, but inclined to go into a detailed discussion of the water question, which, of course, the committee was not prepared to do, even though such was within the scope of its authority. Mr. Dale created a laugh by quoting "Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth" and paraphrasing it: "Behold, what a tendency to rush into print and what a lot of letters a little water doth provoke."

THEY ARE EXPERIMENTAL. Mr. Lansing added that Mr. Scranton had mentioned that the present rates were in a way experimental and that relative changes would not be definitely determined until about April 1. Mr. Stells thought the committee should be continued. To discharge it at this time, he believed, would be a confession that the board was too ready to give up the campaign it had launched.

Colonel Hitchcock thought differently. The committee has carried out the duty given it and was now without a mission unless the board felt like directing it to take up some other feature of the question—municipal ownership for instance. "Mr. Scranton is to be commended," Colonel Hitchcock continued, "for the magnificent work he has done, but still there is a question as to whether or not the city would not profit more from the ownership of its own water supply. Considering the present condition of our city government that is the last thing we would want to do just now. The time may come though when we may have a decent city control, and the consideration of the question may be desirable for the future if not for the present."

President Keller then announced that the secretary had a statement to read concerning the water question. Secretary Atherton read as follows: MATTER OF WATER RATES. Notwithstanding all that has been said and written recently, relative to the water rates to manufacturers in this city, and notwithstanding all that may be said in the future, relative to this important question, the committee of the board, and hereby reaffirms, that the water rates to manufacturers in the city of Scranton are too high, and that the rates of the Scranton Gas and Water company are inequitable. This statement can be substantiated by an abundance of good and reliable evidence.

The future of Scranton, and of the Scranton Gas and Water company, depends upon the industrial growth of the city. Its industries should be diversified. There is certainly no argument on this point. In order that we should be placed in a position where we can compete with any city in the country, especially in the East, we believe that a uniform rate to manufacturers would be fair and satisfactory. We therefore ask the Scranton Gas and Water company to make such a rate, believing that by so doing they will materially advance the interest of the city.

PREPARED BY REQUEST. The secretary explained that the resolution was prepared by request and had been submitted for approval to a number of members of the board. Captain May moved that action on the statement be postponed for one month and that the secretary be instructed to have it printed and distributed among the members. Colonel Hitchcock questioned the advisability of giving the statement to the press, fearing it might be prematurely taken as an expression of the board of trade, when it was simply presented for consideration.

Mr. Lansing said: "Of course publish it. We have no apologies to make for our actions." Mr. Dickson thought this was the proper spirit. He was glad to realize that the board of trade was declaring itself now and then on questions that were worth discussing. The criticism that comes from certain quarters that we are a body of ninnyes will disappear when the public comes to understand that we are aggressive. I also believe," continuing, "that Mr. Scranton will yet feel under obligations towards himself for the unkind things he has said about the board of trade."

Mr. Torrey said: "There is only one question at issue: Whether or not the Scranton Gas and Water company can lower its rates without unduly diminishing its revenue. We cannot intelligently discuss that question except by going into the courts to secure enlightenment on the revenue and capital of the present company, for it is safe to believe that no voluntary act of the company will furnish that information. The other question to be considered is the feasibility of securing another water supply for manufacturers."

Thus ended the water discussion. NEW ROAD ENDORSED. The resolution on the new road was unanimously adopted. It read as follows: Whereas, The securing of a lower

Estimated meter rate, November, if no well, \$26 74 Amount of buckwheat coal used in twelve months, 1898, \$22.50, per month, \$2.50 average. The Scranton Bedding Co., F. H. Benton, Secretary. Below will be found a statement from Mr. A. B. Warman, of the Lackawanna laundry, which is a commercial proposition, and goes to emphasize the point taken by the board, to wit, that water rates for industrial and commercial purposes in Scranton are too high, and far in excess of those charged in many other cities: Scranton, Pa., Dec. 14, 1899.

Mr. D. B. Atherton, Secretary Board of Trade, city. Receiving to your request pertaining to the past and present water rates for our laundry premises (not including barn), we find that previous to the meter rates we paid \$194 a year. The first month during meter service our bill was for 683,400 gallons at ten cents—\$68.34. The second month (November), 730,750 gallons, \$73.08. We estimate from the amount of water used these two months that our water bill for one year, October 1, 1899, to October 1, 1900, will be \$1,000.

In conversation with a prominent laundryman from another Pennsylvania city, yesterday I learned that he does not take on the amount of laundry work compared with our plant. He pays \$100 a year. Very truly yours, A. B. Warman. COMPELLED TO WASTE WATER. For good and sufficient reasons the names of concerns that are purposely wasting thousands of gallons of water per day, in order to come under a lower rate, and thereby decrease their monthly water bills, are withheld. A number of cases can be cited where this is being done, suffice to refer to only one in detail. In this case a certain concern using less than fifty thousand gallons per day, at a certain time each month open their water system, allowing sufficient water to run to bring the average meter reading up to fifty thousand gallons per day. At an average consumption of one hundred gallons per day, their monthly water bill cannot exceed \$50, if they use but 48,000 gallons their monthly bill would be \$115.20, therefore by increasing their meter they decrease the amount of their bill \$25 per month.

Mr. Scranton has acknowledged that perhaps their card rates are inequitable, and has intimated that he would consider suggestions that would better the matter. A uniform rate would obviate the entire difficulty, and put all manufacturers on an equal. As stated above, Scranton should have diversified industries. At the present water rates, we are able to secure only such industries as use a minimum quantity of water, and we are unable to negotiate with industries that use water for other than steam purposes, which hinders our city, with its beautiful water and the like, who use large quantities of water for dyeing, cleaning and scouring purposes. The manufacturers committee are continually meeting this question of high water rates. It enters into every discussion with proposed manufacturers.

If the water rates here are comparatively low, why does the Lackawanna Iron and Steel company pump the filthy water from the Lackawanna river for use at their mill, and why are so many concerns putting down wells and using water that secured wherever possible? PURE AND ABUNDANT SUPPLY. The Scranton board of trade has repeatedly referred to the abundant and pure supply of water furnished by the Scranton Gas and Water company. We have taken great pride in advertising full details of the wonderful water system of our city, with its beautiful mountain lakes and superb drives, which the great public can enjoy without let or hindrance. We have never presumed for a moment to suggest to how the business of the Scranton Gas and Water company should be conducted. We have only presumed to undertake to show the Scranton Gas and Water company that their rates to manufacturers are too high, believing that we are in a better position than they are to judge, as we are continually compelled to meet and overcome their unselfish and patriotic efforts to advance the interests of the city.

We believe that inasmuch as Mr. Scranton has more financial interest by far in the growth of the city than any member of the board of trade, that he should meet more than half way, and by co-operating with the board of trade, place our city beyond all possibility of retrogression when the anthracite coal measures are exhausted. Could we, through the courtesy of Mr. Scranton, obtain a five cent uniform rate for water to industrial and commercial institutions, we believe that our city would steadily grow along these lines, until all fear of the future of the city would be dispelled. Should the present water rates continue, we may expect other cities like Elmington with a six cent and seven and one-half cent rate, Altoona with a four and one-half cent to ten cent rate, Erie with a six cent uniform rate, Philadelphia with a four cent uniform rate, Harrisburg with a two and one-half cent to eight cent rate, and Reading with a three and three-fourths to twelve cent rate to advance in the industrial growth at a much more rapid pace than it is possible for the city of Scranton to attain.

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